

Before the  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
Consumer Information and Disclosure	)	CG Docket No. 09-158
	)	
Truth-in-Billing and Billing Format	)	CG Docket No. 98-170
	)	
IP-Enabled Services	)	WC Docket No. 04-36

**COMMENTS OF BILLING CONCEPTS, INC.**

Billing Concepts, Inc. (“BCI”) respectfully submits the following comments in response to the Notice of Inquiry (“NOI”), CG Docket No. 09-158, issued by the Federal Communications Commission (the “Commission”) adopted August 27, 2009.

**I. Introduction**

BCI is the largest third-party billing aggregator in the United States and has been providing its services for over two decades, to millions of consumers. As a billing aggregator, BCI enables service providers to include their charges on the Local Exchange Carriers’ (each a “LEC”) wireline telephone bills and fosters competition by allowing consumers to access a variety of services at competitive prices. Based on BCI’s experience, BCI is able to provide substantive and valuable information on voluntary industry standards to reduce cramming, the dispute resolution process and the impact that bill formatting changes may have on the Truth in Billing (“TIB”) Orders.

**II. Voluntary Industry Standards to Reduce Cramming**

BCI has the industry’s first and only comprehensive due diligence and performance monitoring program in order to reduce cramming. BCI completes a rigorous due diligence process of all potential customers and the services they intend to offer to local consumers before

any charges are forwarded to the LECs. The basis for the entire Program is an express authorization requirement. The objective is to eliminate cramming before it occurs and proactively address issues when they arise. The Program consists of due diligence, monthly performance monitoring, and testing of express authorization.

The due diligence process is a 100 step process where BCI does a complete comprehensive review of documents, information, and research before records are submitted to LECs. BCI “pre-screens” each service provider before it accepts them as customers by performing background and criminal checks of all the officers of potential service-provider customers and hiring a company to perform an on-site inspection of the facility where the services will be provided. BCI also orders an Experian report and requires articles of incorporation and other corporate documents for additional information about the service providers’ business. BCI then performs additional research about the service providers’ sign-up process and the service itself. Once the company has been thoroughly researched, BCI will randomly select 30 bill numbers and request documentation that shows the end users authorized those charges. BCI will not forward any of the first set of charges to the LEC for billing unless the service provider provides written documentation that all 30 randomly selected charges were in fact authorized. Once the customer is allowed to start billing, BCI monitors the number of consumer, regulatory, and LEC inquiries associated with each customer and if the number of inquiries exceeds any of BCI’s preset thresholds, then BCI repeats the “30 random charges” confirmation process to identify any performance issues. If a service provider is determined to be performing poorly, BCI requires that service provider to submit an action plan to improve their performance. If the service provider fails to show improvement, BCI has the option to either suspend or terminate the provider.

The benefits of the program are to create a proactive approach instead of a reactive response and to increase and improve consumer protection. This process is put in place not only to protect the consumer, but protect BCI and BCI's customers. BCI's customers know they will have to comply with this process or risk losing the ability to bill for their various services, which could ultimately cost them their business. BCI's program has prevented service providers from submitting unauthorized records, which has had a positive impact by eliminating cramming in those instances. BCI works closely with the LECs to continue to improve its testing and monitoring program.

### **III. BCI's Fundamental Dispute Resolution Process**

BCI receives various types of customer service inquiries, including consumer's claiming someone else in the household made the call and rate inquiries. The objective is for the consumer to speak to the service provider directly because they have the most information. If the service provider's toll free number was listed on the bill, the consumer would have access to the authorization information associated with the sign up, and resolve their inquiry.

BCI has a liberal credit policy and our toll free number appears on every consumer's bill. BCI's customer service call center is open Monday through Friday, from 7 A.M. to 9 P.M. Central Standard Time, and BCI's average answer time delay is 30 seconds or less. As an additional means of contact, BCI also lists its customer service website on the LEC bills, if feasible. This enables the consumer to submit an inquiry via electronic mail and provides customer service access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

BCI monitors the level of customer service inquiries versus the number of records shipped, by client, on a monthly basis. Over the last twelve month period, BCI shipped

approximately 25 million records per month, and had an average monthly inquiry rate of 1.8 percent.<sup>1</sup>

#### **IV. Bill Format Changes to Enhance the Impact of The Truth-in-Billing Orders**

BCI is a strong supporter of the Commission's -Billing ("TIB") Orders. The ultimate objective of the service providers, the billing aggregator, and the LECs is to ensure that consumers understand all charges in their telephone bill and, in the event there is any confusion, the consumer is able to contact the service provider in order to respond to their inquiry. The TIB provides an effective framework for the parties to achieve the unanimous objective; however, there is always room for improvement.

BCI believes that consumers may be confused about who their service provider is due to the bill format. The bill format is mandated by each specific LEC. The service provider is the actual entity that makes the initial contact with the consumer and maintains the relationship with them. Some consumers have alleged that the intention is to hide who the service provider is. BCI believes that by increasing the font size of the service provider, consumers will recognize the service provider and the associated charge. BCI is also limited to a specific character length when providing a description of the charge, which may lead to further consumer confusion. Expanding this area should increase awareness of what service the consumer has agreed to. BCI also strongly recommends that the toll-free customer service number of each service provider is added next to each charge, similar to the format on credit card bills. This will allow the consumer to contact the service provider directly, who will have the ability to immediately address and resolve the consumer's concern.

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<sup>1</sup>This number applies to BCI and its affiliates

**V. Conclusion**

As a strong supporter of TIB, BCI believes the proposed changes to the bill format will enable the consumer to have a clear understanding of their bill and a more efficient means of resolving disputes. As the industry leader, BCI has been and remains actively involved in efforts on all levels to craft an effective and efficient means of combating cramming. BCI believes its due diligence and performance monitoring program assists in achieving that goal.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sylvia Castillo', written over a horizontal line.

Sylvia Castillo, Director Regulatory Affairs

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